

Community Institute for Psychotherapy

1330 Lincoln Ave #201, San Rafael, CA 94901-2141

Phone (415) 459-5999 Fax (415) 459-5602 www.cipmarin.org

2021-2022 News & Notes – July 2022



July 2022 News and Notes

Home is Everyone's Responsibility

By Robin Joy Berenson, PhD, LMFT

There are many good reasons for children to participate in the ongoing chores required to maintain a home. In addition to learning practical skills, children take pride in being responsible for their assigned tasks, a pride that carries over into school work, interpersonal relationships, and beyond. Yet many parents find it difficult to require children to pitch in, especially if they did not share family chores as children themselves.

Jason and Sandy were pleasantly surprised when their four kids quickly picked up the new family routines. They had been reluctant to put a chore regimen in place, but did so at the advice of a teacher who saw how hard the children struggled to arrive at school on time. Now, with a more structured morning routine and the whole family pitching in, everything worked more smoothly. Mornings were no longer a chaotic scramble.

Getting started: Ideally, parents begin to talk with children about family routines and tasks when they are very young. "Now that you're 3, it's time to learn about our home." As time goes on, you can add more tasks and responsibilities.

With children of any age, begin by listing all the age-appropriate chores that need to be done and let them choose which ones they will be responsible for. At first, do the chores with them for a week or so, allowing them to gain confidence and see how they improve. Being responsible for picking up their own toys or art supplies, pulling up the bedspread, putting clothes in the hamper, are all things young children can manage. Feeding the dog before breakfast each morning is a great way to teach about caring for both pets and people.

As you work together, make the task fun. Tell a story as you go. Show how many different ways you can fold a napkin. Allow him or her to choose the color of the placemats or decorations for the table. Outdoor chores, such as weeding and planting, can be particularly fun for children who can watch the plants and flowers grow and change throughout the summer. Some children enjoy having their own section in the garden to plant and tend.

Be patient: Very young children are naturally eager to help, often before they can do a chore adeptly. Letting them do what they can allows them to master a task, adding to their sense of self-accomplishment.

Make sure your expectations are appropriate for your child's age and temperament. If you have questions, talk with his or her teacher or pediatrician. Setting a task that is too difficult can be frustrating and cause the child to lose confidence and avoid completing it.

Be consistent: Setting clear expectations and consistently following through is instrumental to helping a child understand the importance of being reliable and responsible. Handling chores at home carries over to school work and extracurricular activities.

Chores also help teach time management. How will they fit their responsibilities into their schedules? Especially in busy households, where scheduling can be hectic, let children know the plan for the day, what will happen in what order, and what will be expected of them. Many children are much more ready to join in when they know in advance.

Community Institute for Psychotherapy

1330 Lincoln Ave #201, San Rafael, CA 94901-2141

Phone (415) 459-5999 Fax (415) 459-5602 www.cipmarin.org

2021-2022 News & Notes – July 2022



Avoid power struggles: When there is opposition or an uncooperative attitude, it may be because the child doubts his or her ability to do the chore correctly. Talk with your child about it. If it's simply about not wanting to do it, then it is not about the chores, but about power. It's very important not to embroil yourself in a power struggle.

Make it clear that it is important to complete the task before the next activity. Let them know if they are taking out toys that they will need to put the toys away at the end of playtime before lunch or the next activity. If the child balks at clean-up, you can say, "We have peanut butter and jelly for lunch, but you need to clean-up first." "I have a really good book to read together, but I can't until the toys are put back."

If the child still won't respond, you can say, "I can see you need to think about this." Then give him or her a time-out, and leave the room. Don't linger or re-engage. Don't put the toys away. If you give in ("just this once") you are not helping the child, but reinforcing negative behaviors, and assuring that such situations will arise again and again. If a child misses a meal or feels sad about not hearing the story, these are temporary lessons that will teach responsibility and the need to follow-through.

Lessons for a lifetime: We give our children a gift when we let them know we trust them to be reliable and responsible, and appreciate what they contribute to the family as a whole. In practical terms, we give them the opportunity to develop a wide range of skills, from home upkeep to personal discipline.

Growing up, Margaret's mother never enjoyed cooking and never enlisted her daughter's help in the kitchen. Any attempt of Margaret's to join in were rejected as her mother wanted to be done as quickly as possible. With her own family, Margaret always felt awkward in the kitchen. Nevertheless, she made it a point to include her children, including her sons, in meal preparation. It became a time of family cooperation and fun. As adults, Margaret's three children think fondly of those times and have carried on the tradition in their own families.